Unit .21

Session .03

Jesus Teaches About New Birth

Scripture

John 3:3-18

3 Jesus replied, "Truly I tell you, unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." **4** "How can anyone be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked him. "Can he enter his mother's womb a second time and be born?" **5** Jesus answered, "Truly I tell you, unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. **6** Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit. **7** Do not be amazed that I told you that you must be born again. **8** The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear its sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." **9** "How can these things be?" asked Nicodemus. **10** "Are you a teacher of Israel and don't know these things?" Jesus replied. **11** "Truly I tell you, we speak what we know and we testify to what we have seen, but you do not accept our testimony. **12** If I have told you about earthly things and you don't believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? **13** No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven —the Son of Man. **14** "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, **15** so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. **16** For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. **17** For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. **18** Anyone who believes in him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God.

Options

Main Point:
The new birth is God's supernatural transformation in the hearts of people.

Option 1

Ask each of your students to prepare one "What Am I?" riddle. Here's an example: "I have a face and hands, and I go around and around, but I have no legs and don't get anywhere. What am I?" The answer is a watch, or a clock. Here's another: "I've got four legs, but I never get anywhere. What am I?" The answer is a table, or a bed.

Students can make the answer to their riddle any noun: it can be tangible or intangible, a person, a place, a thing, or an idea; the answers can be "religious" or "secular." Give them some time to come up with a riddle. Then, let them share their riddles. See who comes up with some really good ones.

Pose to them one final riddle: "I'm a work of the Holy Spirit, I come through faith in the Son, and I'm a gift of the Father. What am I?" The answer could actually be a number of things (e.g., a spiritual gift, or understanding, or salvation), but the answer we're going to explore with today's lesson is the new birth.

Option 2

This exercise will help you figure out what preconceptions your students have about the Trinity's role in the new birth. Tell your students they are going to create illustration aids for missionaries in preliterate cultures or areas (could be a frontier where people don't have writing, or it could be a particularly poor area where most people are illiterate). The missionaries want to show how each person of the Trinity works in salvation. They've asked your students to produce three pictures or pictographs, one for each person of the Godhead. In other words, each individual student will create one picture showing God the Father's role in salvation, one picture showing the Son's role in salvation, and one showing the Spirit's role in salvation (if you have a large group, students could work in pairs). The pictures should be relatively simple; they're looking for something they can use like a flash card or a sign as they verbally explain salvation.

Be sensitive to a few possibilities in this exercise. Your students might be confused by the Trinity, and you may need to go out of your way to emphasize that the three persons are one essence. Other students may (understandably) be hesitant to draw God because of the second commandment (Exodus 20:4), so be sensitive to that possibility, too; remind them they can draw just God's hands, or they could draw a hieroglyphic-like symbol. Still other students might never have considered that each person in the Godhead has a role in salvation; that's okay! Let them draw what they think.

Let students prepare their drawings/diagrams and then show them. See what they came up with. Affirm what is good and promise to fill in the gaps as best you can on any ignorance they have. Specifically, the lesson today will look at each person's role in the new birth, the act of salvation in which a Christian becomes a new creation, as taught by Jesus. Note: You can also do "before" and "after" pictures for this exercise; after the lesson, repeat the drawing-for-the-missionaries exercise to see what they have learned.

TEACHING PLAN

Read John 3:3-8.

When a dog gives birth to a puppy, no one exclaims in shock that it is a puppy. No one hangs around in anticipation, wondering what species a pregnant dog will produce. The headline "Dog Gives Birth to Puppy" won't make the front-page news. Dogs make more dogs. Jesus taught that our spiritual new birth works the same way. By nature, flesh produces flesh; only the Spirit can birth something that is spirit.

Our flesh is fallen, diseased with sin. Since God is holy, He cannot have sin in His kingdom. This presents an obvious problem for us because we are sinful; thus, we cannot enter the kingdom of God as we are. Often we underestimate the weight of our sin and are ignorant of the dire consequences it has. Our very being is marred by sin, causing irreparable separation from God. No amount of sacrifices or religious efforts on our part will heal our spiritual disease.

- **What evidence would you expect to see of a person who was born again?**

Imagine you are in a class with a teacher who has told you she gives pop quizzes. All week she drops ridiculously obvious hints: "You know, I would have the sudden urge to study this for Friday, if I were you"; "Friday feels likely for Judgment Day!" On Friday, none of your classmates would give you much pity if you were completely unprepared for the so-called "pop" quiz. All the signs pointed to it. Even if you couldn't know exactly what material would be on it, you should have had a general idea that it was coming.

The Old Testament foreshadowed the new birth that would one day come in the Spirit. That was why Jesus told Nicodemus he should not be surprised by what Jesus was teaching him. New birth in the Spirit had always been the plan, a permanent solution to the problem the law only temporarily addressed.

Nicodemus' question was sincere. Because he did not understand what Jesus taught, he asked Him to clarify. Jesus did indeed clarify His initial statement. He revealed to Nicodemus that "new birth" is essential for entering into and experiencing the kingdom of God. People don't come into this new relationship with God by simply being spiritual but by yielding to the Holy Spirit. Jesus connected the reality of being "born again" to the necessity of being born of the Spirit. Nicodemus didn't need inside knowledge from Jesus; he needed new birth from the Spirit.

- **How does Jesus' interaction with Nicodemus provide a model for how we engage with those who are religious but not committed to Christ?**

Read John 3:9-15.

The conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus continued, but now Jesus took the lead and began to explain further the "new birth" and its significance. Until that point the religious leaders had rejected Jesus' testimony, which raised an important question: How could the religious leaders compliment Jesus for His teaching on any matter if they rejected His testimony about Himself?

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
The new birth is God's supernatural transformation in the hearts of people.

John 3

1-3. Nicodemus met with Jesus at night, maybe so his meeting wouldn't be noticed by other Pharisees, or maybe because this was the best time for this kind of conversation. Whatever his motivations, Nicodemus sought out Jesus and met with Him.

As their conversation began, Nicodemus affirmed Jesus' ministry of teaching and healing. He recognized that Jesus had the blessing of God on His ministry and complimented Jesus for the signs He performed.

Jesus' response was abrupt. He didn't accept the compliments Nicodemus gave. Instead, He simply said no one would see the kingdom of God without being born again. In other words, unless you are reborn and made new, you will not see God's salvation.

8. Jesus compared the spiritual work of the Spirit to the wind ("spirit" and "wind" are the same word in Greek). Although we can't comprehend the wind or see where it comes from, we see its effects plainly before us: the grass waves, the tree bends, the water swells. No one would suggest that because we can't see the wind it does not exist. In the same way, we cannot understand the Spirit or see where the Spirit comes from, nor can we control the Spirit or bend the Spirit to our will. But we can see the transforming effects of the Spirit all the same as those who have been born again bear the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). We cannot remain unchanged after undergoing so radical a renewal.

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 104, DDG)

Regeneration

Regeneration takes place at the beginning of the Christian life and is the miraculous transformation, or the new birth, that takes place within an individual through the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit (John 3:3-8; Titus 3:5). It is the divine side of conversion (a person turning to Christ in repentance and faith), being the work of God within a person's life that causes him or her to be born again, a work that human effort is unable to produce.

TEACHING PLAN

- **What are some reasons we should trust Jesus' teaching?**
- **What is the connection between a person's character and the value of their testimony?**

Jesus reminded Nicodemus of a story in the Old Testament, found in Numbers 21:4-9. The Israelites were grumbling about their circumstances, after God had brought them out of Egypt. They hated the food God gave them in the wilderness. They accused God of having bad intentions and claimed that God took them out there to die.

The Lord grew angry with the Israelites and punished them by sending serpents into the camp. The plague of serpents was fierce, and the people began to repent. To save the people from the effects of their sin, God told Moses to put a bronze snake on a pole. Anyone who looked at the snake—who gazed upon that symbol of evil—would be healed.

Jesus compared Himself (the Son of Man) to that snake. He pointed forward to the moment when He would take upon Himself the weight of our sin, guilt, and shame. Jesus, like the bronze snake, was lifted up on the cross, both physically and figuratively. He was physically raised up on the beams of wood of the cross, which played into his figurative elevation at the cross, being raised up by God for a time of suffering to accomplish our salvation. Just as the bronze snake was the conduit of God's love and grace to heal the Israelites, so Jesus is the demonstration of God's love and grace to save sinners.

Read John 3:16-18.

The doctrine of the Trinity is an important belief for the Christian, and all three Persons of the Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—are at work in the process of new birth. New birth only comes by the Spirit. We cannot accomplish new birth by our flesh; rather, it must flow from God. Also, new birth by the Spirit is only possible through the Son. Through faith in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our debt is paid and we are put in a position to receive new birth in the Spirit.

This passage highlights that not only does new birth involve the Spirit and the Son but it originates as a gift from the Father. God the Father gave the gift of His Son for our salvation, and this gift came with a terrible, high price—the death of His one and only Son so that we would not perish in our sin.

- **What are some ways we should respond to God for the gift of His Son?**

As believers, we have an urgent calling to share the good news of God's love that enables new birth unto eternal life for our neighbors. God's love is very great and creates an opportunity for the world to be saved from their condemnation. In seeing our deep need for the Father's love and having experienced it by faith in Christ, we are compelled outward—out of our churches and out of ourselves—toward a dying, broken, and hurting world desperately in need of the same love we have received. Since we have been loved with so great a love, we are enabled to love God and love others.

- **How does the loving God of the Bible compare with the ways the world views Him?**

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
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John 3

14. Our spiritual birth is impossible without the intervention of Jesus Christ. Jesus recalled the story of Moses and the bronze serpent (Num. 21:4-9), in which the disobedient Israelites were bitten by poisonous snakes and would die unless they looked at the image of a bronze snake mounted on a pole. New life was given to all who gazed upon the snake. It was lifted up that all may have the opportunity to see it.

Activity

If possible, you'll want some dice for this activity. Students should work in groups of 1 to 3 people. Let students get into their groups and then each group should roll a die. Their number will tell them which point below to focus on:

1-2: new birth as work of the Holy Spirit

3-4: new birth coming from faith in the Son

5-6: new birth as gift of the Father

Next, each group should roll the die again. This time the numbers look like this:

1-2: thanksgiving and praise

3-4: prayer for salvation of the lost

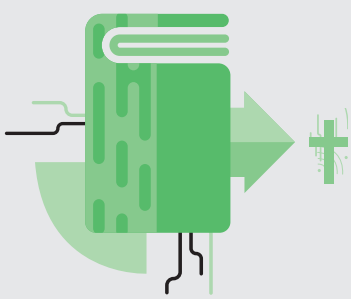
5-6: confidence in God for good witness

Student should now take the theme from their first role and show how it leads to or influences whatever they got in their second role. For instance, the new birth as a gift from the Father prompts us to pray for others to receive this gift; the new birth as a work of the Holy Spirit influences us to rely on Him as we actively share the good news with others so that we don't have to worry about saying everything absolutely perfect.

Students can make a drawing or a skit showing the influence of their first roll on their second. Give them time to make their pieces and then to show them. Debrief afterward with how precious the new birth is and how it empowers to us thanksgiving, prayer, and evangelism.

(p. 105, DDG) Christ Connection

Jesus taught that new birth, not religious activity, was how a person enters the kingdom of God and receives eternal life. New birth is given from God the Father through faith in God the Son as a work of God the Spirit. Because of God's love, we are no longer condemned because of our sin, but we have been given eternal life in Christ.



JESUS TEACHES ABOUT NEW BIRTH

John 3:3–18

JESUS TEACHES ABOUT NEW BIRTH

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JESUS CONNECTION

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LIFEWISE QUALITY

TEACHABLE – Being willing to change my mind and actions as I learn.

HEAD

From what John 3:14-17 says, how is someone able to be born again?

Why did God send His Son into the world?

HEART

Jesus told Nicodemus that he needed to come to God on God's terms, not his own. Nicodemus could not earn, buy or manipulate his way into God's kingdom. What are some ways you have tried to do this? How does the truth that eternal life is a gift we receive by faith turn this way of thinking upside-down?

What attitudes or beliefs do you have that sometimes stand in the way of your willingness to learn from God or others? How can you learn to be more open to the wisdom of others?

HANDS

Nicodemus was one of the greatest teachers in Israel, but he still showed a willingness to learn from Jesus. No matter how good we are at something, or how much we think we know, there is always more to learn. Think of something you already do well and someone you trust who does it even better. This week, ask someone to give you some ideas on how to build or improve on what you already know and practice.